

HEALTH & HOLINESS

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BY FRANCIS THOMPSON



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Health and Holiness

The Science of Life Series

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Health & Holiness

A Study of the Relations between
Brother Ass, the Body, and
his Rider, the Soul

By

Francis Thompson

With a Preface by
The Rev. George Tyrrell, S.J.

PETER ROBINSON COURAGE

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“Let us remember that Nature, though heathenish, reaches at her best to the footstool of the Highest. She is not all dust, but a living portion of the spheres. In aspiration it is an error to despise her, forgetting that through Nature only can we ascend. Cherished, trained, and purified, she is then partly worthy the Divine mate who is to make her wholly so.”

THE PILGRIM'S SCRIP.



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PREFACE

“IT is dangerous treading here,” says the author (p. 26), “yet with reverence I venture.” For whether as a defence, or as a criticism of the ascetical tradition of Christianity, what he says will perhaps raise objections on this side or on that. Else it were not worth saying. Let it first be clearly noted that he is not dealing with the austerities of sanctity so far as they are inspired by the purely religious and mystical motives of atonement and expiation. His theme is Asceticism, which is to the “psychic” man, to the passions and desires, what athletics are to the “physical” man, to the limbs and muscles. It is an instrument or method for the perfecting of our whole nature by the due subjection of the lower to the service of the higher; for the harmonious subordination of the “psychic” to the “pneumatic” or spiritual.

It is therefore “for building-up and not for destruction.” In the Saints, the ascetical tendency is frequently complicated with the sacrificial and self-destructive tendency. This latter is a problem apart, a problem for mystics rather than for moralists. But if at times the mystic may transcend, yet he may never transgress the clear dictates of moral reason; and so he too may meditate with profit on these pages. The crippling of Brother Ass is eventually as fatal to the mystical as to the moral life, both of which require the free use of unimpaired faculties.

Midway between an exaggerated pessimistic spiritualism on the one side, and the naïve animalism (against which it is the equally naïve reaction) on the other, stands the Great Physician of soul and body alike, “with healing on his wings,” the Giver of the meat which perisheth no less than of the meat which endureth. Christian asceticism has ever been in

principle and in aim a synthesis, a tempering of contraries. But if, as an imperishable principle of conduct, asceticism comes more directly under the jurisdiction of divine tradition, yet its application changes with ever changing conditions of life and society, and still more with our growing understanding of the functions of soul and body, and of the precise degree and nature of their interdependence. To adhere rigidly and blindly not merely to the ascetical principles of the Past, but to their old-world applications, were to ignore the bewildering changes that have since swept over the face of society, and to deny all value to the light which has been given us from the Giver of all light through the progress of Physiology and Psychology. An asceticism whose zeal is untempered by such knowledge may easily defeat itself by inducing those very same nervous and mental disorders which proverbially dog the heels of indulgence, and whose root in both cases is to be found

in the violation of the due balance of sense and spirit. On the other hand, the laws of perfect hygiene, the culture of the *corpus sanum*, not for its own sake, but as the pliant, durable instrument of the soul, are found more and more to demand such a degree of persevering self-restraint and self-resistance as constitutes an ascesis, a mortification, no less severe than that enjoined by the most rigorous masters of the spiritual life.

In these pages the thoughts of many hearts are revealed in speech that is within the faculty of few, but within the understanding of all. They are an expression of fallible opinion, not of infallible dogma. Mistakes there may be, but, as the author says, "The mistake of personal speculation is after all merely a mistake, and no one will impute it to authority."

G. TYRRELL.

HEALTH AND HOLINESS

THIS is an age when everywhere the rights of the weaker against the stronger are being examined and asserted ; the rights of labour against capital, of subjects against their rulers, of wives against their husbands, the lower creation against its irresponsible master, man. Is it coincidence merely, that the protest of the body against the tyranny of the spirit is also audible and even hearkened ? Within the Church itself, which has ever fostered the claims of the oppressed against the oppressor, a mild and rational appeal has made itself heard. For the body is the spouse of the spirit,

The
Body's
rights.

Health and Holiness

The Body's appeal.

and the democratic element in the complex state of man. In the very courts of the spirit the claims—might we say the rights?—of the body are being tolerantly judged.

It was not so once. The body had no rights against her husband, the spirit. One might say, she had no marital rights: she was a squaw, a hewer of wood and drawer of water for her heaven-born mate. Did she rebel, she was to be starved into submission. Was she slack in obedience, she was to be punished by the infliction of further tasks. Did she groan that things were beyond her strength, she was goaded into doing them, while the tyrannous spirit bitterly exclaimed on her

slovenly performance. To over-drive a donkey was barbarous : to over-drive one's own lawful body a meritorious act. A poet I know has put, after his own fashion, the case between body and spirit—

“ Said sprite o' me to body o' me :
‘ A malison on thee, trustless creature,
That prat'st thyself mine effigy
To them which view thy much misfeature.
My hest thou no ways slav'st aright,
Though slave-service be all thy nature :
An evil thrall I have of thee,
Thou adder coiled about delight ! ’

“ Said body o' me to sprite o' me :
‘ Since bricks were wroughten without straw,
Was never task-master like thee !
Who art more evil of thy law
Than Egypt's sooty Mizraim—
That beetle of an ancient dung :
Nought recks it thee though I in limb
Wax meagre—so thy songs be sung.’

“ Thus each by other is mis-said,
And answereth with like despite ;

The spirit bruises body's head ;
The body fangs the heel of sprite ;
And either hath the other's wrong.
And ye may see, that of this stour
My heavy life doth fall her flower."

But the hallowed plea for slave-driving the body was not poetry, of which this writer's fleshly spouse so piteously complains ; it was virtue. And the crowning feature of the happy and approved relation between body and spirit was this : that the luckless body could not escape by obedience and eschewing rebellion : she was then visited with stripes and hunger lest she *should* rebel. The body, in fact, was a proclaimed enemy ; and as an enemy it was treated. If it began to feel but a little comfortable, high time had come to set about making it un-

comfortable, or — like Oliver — it would be asking for more.

Modern science and advanced physiology must needs be felt even in the science of spirituality. Men begin to suspect that much has been blamed to the body which should justly be laid on the mismanagement of its master. It is felt that the body has rights: nay, that the neglect of those rights may cause it to take guiltless vengeance on the soul. We may sin against the body in other ways than are catalogued in Liguori; and impoverished blood—who knows?—may mean impoverished morals. The ancients long ago held that love was a derangement of the hepatic

functions. “*Torrit jecur, urit jecur,*” says Horace with damnable iteration; and Horace ought to know. And now, not many years ago, a distinguished Jesuit director of souls, in his letters to his penitents, has hinted over and over again that spiritual disease may harbour in a like vicinage.

Within the limits of his own meaning this spiritual director (the late Archbishop Porter, S.J.), was wisely right. He was aware that men of sedentary habit and unshakably introspective temperament may endure spiritual torments for which a fortnight’s walking-tour is more sovereign than the exercises of St. Ignatius. And how many such

men are there now? Perhaps for this very reason the delicate connection between mind and body is recognised as it never was before. In truth, Health, as the Archbishop suggested, may be no mean part of Holiness; and not by mere superficial analogy has imagery drawn from the athlete been perpetually applied to the Saint. That I do not speak without warrant of the Archbishop's attitude, let these passages from his published "Letters" show:—

"As for the evil thoughts, I have so uniformly remarked in your case that they are dependent upon your state of health, that I say without hesitation, begin a course

Better
feast-ful
than
fretful.

of Vichy and Carlsbad." . . . "Better far to eat meat on Good Friday than to live in war with every one about us. I fear much you do not take enough food and rest. You stand in need of both, and it is not wise to starve yourself into misery. Jealousy and all similar passions become intensified when the body is weak." . . . "Your account of your spiritual condition is not very brilliant; still you must not lose courage. . . . Much of your present suffering comes, I fear, from past recklessness in the matter of health."

We might quote indefinitely; but it is enough to remind the reader how much and how wisely has the modern Confessor adapted

himself to the modern Man. Nay, the very conditions of modern sanctity may be said to have changed, so changed are we. There was a time—strange as it must seem, there was a time upon the earth when man flew in the face of the east wind. He did not like the east wind—his proverbs remain to tell us so; but this was merely because it gave him catarrh, or rheumatism, or inflamed throat, and such gross outward maladies. It did not dip his soul in the gloom of earthquake and eclipse; his hair, and skin, and heart were not made desiccate together. A spiritual code which grew into being for this Man whose moral nature remained unruffled by the east wind, may surely be said to have

Another
Creation.

leaked its validity before it reached us. He was a being of another creation. He ate, and feared not; he drank, and in all Shakespeare there is no allusion to *delirium tremens*; his schoolmaster flogged him large-heartedly, and he was almost more tickled by the joke than by the cane; he wore a rapier at his side, and stabbed or was stabbed by his brother-man in pure good fellowship and sociable high spirits. For him the whole apparatus of virtue was constructed, a robust system fitted to a robust time. Strong, forthright minds were suited by strong forthright direction, redounding vitality by severities of repression; the hot wine of life needed allay. But to our generation un-

compromising fasts and severities of conduct are found to be piteously alien; not because, as rash censors say, we are too luxurious, but because we are too nervous, intricate, devitalised. We find our austerities ready-made. The east wind has replaced the discipline, dyspepsia the hair-shirt. Either may inflict a more sensitive agony than a lusty anchorite suffered from lashing himself to blood. It grows a vain thing for us to mortify the appetite,—would we had the appetite to mortify!—macerate an evanescing flesh, bring down a body all too untimely spent and forwearied, a body which our liberal-lived sires have transmitted to us quite effectually brought down. The pride of

Man
his own
mortifi-
cation.

life is no more; to live is itself an ascetic exercise; we require spurs to being, not a snaffle to rein back the ardour of being. Man is his own mortification. Hamlet has increased and multiplied, and his seed fill the land. Would any Elsinore director have advised austerities for the Prince, or judged to the letter his self-accusings?—and to this complexion has many an one come. The very laughers ask their night-lamps—

“Is all laughed in vain?”

Merely to front existence, for some, is a surrender of self, a choice of ineludibly rigorous abnegation.

It was not so with our fortunate (or, at least, earth-happier) ancestors. For them, doubtless, the

old idea worked roughly well. They lashed themselves with chains; they went about in the most frightful forms of hair-shirt, which grew stiffened with their blood; and yet were unrestingly energetic. For us it would mean valetudinarian impotence; which, without heroic macerations, is but too apt to overtake us. They turned anchorites in the English country, the English fens, among the English fogs and raw blasts; they exposed themselves defenceless to all the horrors of an English summer; and they were not converted into embodied cramp and arthritis. This implies a constitution we can but dimly conjecture, to which austerity, so to speak, was a wholesome antidote. Their bodies

Giants'
days.

were hot colts, which really needed training and breaking — and very strong breaking, too. They had often, questionless, to be ridden with a cruel curb. When we look at Italy of the Renascence, at England of the sixteenth century, we are amazed. There were giants in those days. Those were the days of *virtu*—when the ideal of men was vital force, to do everything with their whole strength. And they did it. In good and in evil they redounded. *Pecca fortiter*, said Luther; and they sinned strongly. Ezzelin fascinating men with the horror of his tyranny. Aretin blazoning his lusts and infamies, Sforza ravening his way to a throne, Cæsar Borgia conquering Italy with a poisoned

sword, would have sneered at the scented sins of the present day. The seething energies of our sixteenth century,—fighting, hating, stabbing, plotting, throwing out poetry in splendid reckless floods and cataracts, seem to emanate from beings of another order than ourselves. And these men who are thrown to the forefront of history imply a fierce undercurrent of general vitality. The mediæval men fight amidst the torrid lands of the East jerkined and breeched with iron which it makes us ache to look upon ; our men in khaki fall out by hundreds during peace - manœuvres on an English down. They cheapened pain, those forefathers of ours ; they endured and apportioned the most monstrous

Jocose
torture.

tortures with equal carelessness, reckless of their own suffering or that of others. Read the tortures inflicted on the rebels against Henry IV.; and how “good old Sir Thomas Erpingham” rode round one of them, taunting him in the awful crisis of his agony. Yet Sir Thomas died at Agincourt in the odour of knightly honour, and doubtless was as far from remembering that thoughtless little incivility as any one was from remembering it against him. We cannot conceive the exuberant vitality and nervous insensibility of these men. Some image of the latter quality we may get by turning to the ascetics of the East, who still swing themselves by the heels over a smoky fire, and practise other public

forms of self-torture, with (apparently) small nervous exhaustion. Here and there among ourselves, of course, such conditions still exist to witness what was once usual. Such bodies, we may well believe, needed the awe of hunger and stripes, and, without rigorous rebuke from the spirit, were always lying in wait for its heel.

But not only have conditions changed: there is another influence, unrecognised, yet subtly potent in affecting an altered attitude towards the externals of asceticism. The interaction between body and spirit is understood, or at least apprehended (for comprehended it cannot be), as never it was before. St. Paul,

Paul the
Intuitive.

indeed, that profoundly original and intuitive mind, long since saw and first proclaimed it, in its broad theological aspect. “ I do not that good which I will ; but the evil which I hate, that I do . . . The good which I will, I do not ; but the evil which I will not, that I do. . . . I find then a law, that when I will to do good, evil is present with me. For I am delighted with the law of God, according to the inward man : but I see another law in my members, fighting against the law of my mind, and captivating me in the law of sin, that is in my members. Unhappy man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death ? ” That was the primal cry of the discovery, which has never been

more pregnantly and poignantly expressed. Upon it arose a complex theological system ; but outside that system, the realisation of this mysterious truth went no further. One might almost say that its intimacy was removed and deadened by the circumvallation of theological truisms. But the progress of physiological research has brought it home to the flesh of man. Science, not for the sole time or the last, has become the witness and handmaid of theology. Scripture swore that the sins of the fathers should be visited on the children to the third and fourth generation ; science has borne testimony to that asseveration with the terrible teaching of heredity. Of the internecine grapple between

The immemorial grapple.

body and spirit, Science, quick to question the spirit, has in her own despite witnessed much. With the fable of "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde" Stevenson has simply incarnated St. Paul's thesis in unforgettable romance. But upon this quickened and vital sense of the immemorial grapple between body and soul has come also a sense of its unsuspected complexity. We can no longer set body against spirit and let them come to grips after the light-hearted fashion of our ancestors. We realise that their intertwinnings are of infinite delicacy, endless multiplicity: no stroke upon the one but is innumerably reverberated by the other. We cannot merely ignore the body: it

will not be ignored, and has un-guardable avenues of retaliation. This is no rough-and-tumble fight, with no quarter for the vanquished. We behold ourselves swayed by ghostly passions; the past usurps us; the dead replay their tragedy on our fleshly stage. To the body itself we owe a certain inevitable obedience, as the father owes a measure of obeisance to the child, and the ruler is governed by the ruled. The imperial spirit must order his going by his fleshly shackles; he must hear it said, "Thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall bind thee, and lead thee whither thou wouldst not." And wisdom will often submit to the tyrannous impotence of the inferior. For

Tyranny
of im-
potence.

though weak compliance be fatal, arrogant rigidity is like to be only less so. The stumbling of the feeble subject shall bring down the strong ruler ; a brain-fever change a straight-walking youth into a flagitious and unprincipled wastrel. But recently we had the medically-reported case of a model lad who after an illness proved a liar and a pilferer. It were unsafe, truly, to reason from extremes; but extremes bring into light forces and tendencies which in their wonted action go unsuspected.

Even in the heroic ages, of men and religion, did these things play no part unrecognised ? Was the devil always the devil ? Whether the devil might on occasion be the

stomach (as the Archbishop hints) may be a perilous question ; though some will make small scruple that the stomach may be the devil. That the demon could have been purged from Saul by medicinal draughts were a supposition too much in the manner of the Higher Criticism ; though to Macbeth's interrogation : “ Canst thou not minister to a mind diseased ? ” the modern M.D. of Edinburgh would answer : “ Sire, certainly ! ” He can often purge from the mind a rooted trouble ; nor do we in such cases throw physic to the dogs. But as men lay their sins on the devil who indeed save him the labour of tempting them, so he may be accused for that which comes only from the mishandling of their

Sanctity
is Genius
in Reli-
gion.

own bodies. The author of mischief can leave much mischief to be worked for him, and needs but to wait on men's mistakes. Even in the ascetic way, shall one aver such error could not have intruded? It is dangerous treading here; yet with reverence I adventure: since the mistake of personal speculation is after all merely a mistake, and no one will impute to it authority.

Grace does not cast out nature; but the way of grace is founded on nature. Sanctity is genius in religion; the Saint lives for and in religion, as the man of genius lives for and in his peculiar attainment. Nay, it might be said that sanctity is the supreme form of

genius, and the Saints the only true men of genius; with the great difference that sanctity is dependent on no special privilege—or curse—of temperament. Both are the outcome of a man's inner and individual love, and are characterised by an eminent fervour, which is the note of love in action. Bearing these things in mind, it should not surprise us to find occasional parallelisms between the psychology of the Saints and the psychology of men of genius,—parallelisms which study might perhaps extend, and which are specially observable where the genius is of the poetic or artistic kind—in the broad sense of the word “artistic.” Both Saint and Poet undergo a preparation for their work; and in both a

"Poet
and
Saint."

notable feature of this preparation is a period of preliminary retirement. Even the Poets most in and of the world experience it in some form; though in their case it may be an inward process only, leaving no trace on their outward life. It is part of the mysterious law which directs all fruitful increase. The lily, about to seed, withdraws from the general gaze, and lapses into the claustral bosom of the water. Spiritual incubation obeys the same unheard command; whether it be Coleridge in his cottage at Nether Stowey, or Ignatius in his cave at Manresa. In Poet, as in Saint, this retirement is a process of pain and struggle. For it is nothing else than a gradual conformation to artistic law. He

absorbs the law into himself; or rather he is himself absorbed into the law, moulded to it, until he become sensitively respondent to its faintest motion, as the spiritualised body to the soul. Thenceforth he needs no guidance from formal rule, having a more delicate rule within him. He is a law to himself, or indeed he is the law. In like manner does the Saint receive into himself and become one with divine law, whereafter he no longer needs to follow where the flocks have trodden, to keep the beaten track of rule; his will has undergone the heavenly magnetisation by which it points always and unalterably towards God.

Emo-
tional
vibration.

In both Saint and Poet this process is followed by a rapid and bountiful development of power: in both there are throes, as it were the throes of birth. Light and darkness succeed each other like the successive waves of sun and gloom on a hillside under a brightly windy sky; but the gloom is prolonged, the light swift and intermittent. The despairing chasms of agony into which the Saints are plunged have their analogy in those paroxysms of loss and grief related by Chateaubriand, Berlioz, and others. How far these things are conditioned by the body in the case of the Poet is obscure. If the uniform nature, in them all, of these emotional crises points to a psychic origin, it is none

the less difficult to avoid the suspicion, the probable suspicion, that physical reaction is an accessory cause. In the case of the Saint, shall we hold the body always guiltless? Did those passionate austerities of the Manresa cavern (for one typical instance) leave the body hale and sane? Had we to reckon solely with the natural order, the answer would not be doubtful; and, since sanctity has never asserted itself an antidote against the consequences of indiscreet actions, I know not why one should shrink from drawing the likely conclusion and adventuring the likely hypothesis. That celestial unwisdom of fast, vigil, and corporal chastening must, it is like, have exposed Ignatius to the reactions of

The
body's
revenges.

the weakened body. Fast is the diet of angels, said St. Athanasius; and Milton echoed him—

“Spare fast, that oft with gods doth diet.” .
But when mortals surfeit on that food, and superadd stripes and night-watching, the forspent body is prone to strange revenges. In some measure, is it not possible such may have mingled with the experiences and temptations of Ignatius? The reality of these ghostly conflicts there is not need to doubt; I do not doubt. But with them who shall say what may have been the intermixture of subjective symptoms, fumes of the devitalised flesh? When, the agony past, the battle won, the wedlock with divine law achieved, Ignatius emerged from the

cave to carry his hard-won spiritual arms against the world, he saw coiled round a wayside cross a green serpent. Was this indeed an apparition, to be esteemed beside the heavenly monitions of the cavern, or rather such stuff as Macbeth's air-drawn dagger, the issue of an over-wrought brain? I recall a poet, passing through that process of seclusion and interior gestation already considered. In his case the psychological manifestations were undoubtedly associated with disorder of the body. In solitude he underwent profound sadness and suffered brief exultations of power: the wild miseries of a Berlioz gave place to accesses of half-pained delight. On a day when the skirts of a prolonged

A
modern
instance.

darkness were drawing off for him, he walked the garden, inhaling the keenly languorous relief of mental and bodily convalescence ; the nerves sensitised by suffering. Pausing in reverie before an arum, he suddenly was aware of a minute white-stoled child sitting on the lily. For a second he viewed her with surprised delight, but no wonder ; then returning to consciousness, he recognised the hallucination almost in the instant of her vanishing. The apparition had no connection with his reverie ; and though not perhaps so strongly visual as to deceive an alert mind, suggests the possibility of such deception. Furthermore, one notes that the green serpent of St. Ignatius, unlike the divine monitions in the

cave, unlike the visions in general of the saints, was apparently purposeless : it had not function of warning, counsel, temptation, or trial. Yet repetitions of the experience in the saint's after life make it rash, despite all this, to decide what is not capable of decision, and to say that it may have been a trick of fine-worn nerves.

There is at any rate a possibility that, even in the higher ascetic life, the means used to remove the stumbling-block of the body may set up in it a fresh stumbling-block, to a certain degree ; that even here Brother Ass may take his stubborn retaliation ; and this is a possibility of which our ancestors had

Asceti-
cism with
a differ-
ence.

no dream. St. Ignatius himself came to think that he had done penance not wisely but too well at Manresa ; nevertheless it was only the after-effects at which he glanced, the impairing of his physical utility in later years. With modern lack of constitution the possibility is increased. No spread of knowledge can efface asceticism ; but we may, perhaps, wear our asceticism with a difference.

The devil is out of most of our bodies before our youth is long past ; in many it scarce exists. The modern body hinders perfection after the way of the weakling ; it scandalises by its feebleness and sloth ; it exceeds by luxury and the softer forms of vice, not by hot

insurgence; it abounds in vanity, frivolity, and all the petty sins of the weakling which vitiate the spirit; it pushes to pessimism, which is the wail of the weakling turning back from the press; to agnosticism, which is sometimes a form of mental sloth—"It is too much trouble to have a creed." It no longer lays forcible hands on the spirit, but clogs and hangs back from it. And in some sort there was more hope with the old body than with this new one. When the energies of the old body were once yoked to the chariot-pole of God, they went fast. But what shall be made of a body whose energies lie down in the road? When to these things is added the crowning vice and familiar accompaniment of

Saints'
regrets.

weakness—selfishness, it is clear indeed that we require an asceticism; but not so clear that the asceticism we require is the old asceticism. Can this inertia of the modern body be met by breaking still further the beast already over-feeble for its load? It is not possible. In those old valiant days, when the physical frame waxed fat and kicked, the most ardent saints ended in the confession of a certain remorse for their tyrannous usage of the accursed flesh. St. Ignatius, we have said, came to think he had needlessly crippled his body—after all, a necessary servant — by the unweighed severity of Manresa. Even the merciless Assisian — merciless towards himself, as tender towards all

others—confessed on the deathbed of his slave-driven body: “I have been too hard on Brother Ass.”

Yes, Brother Ass, poor Brother Ass, had been inhumanly ridden; and but for his stubborn constitution would have gone nigh to hamper the sanctity he could not prevent. In these days he is a weak beast, and may not stand a tithe of the burdens a Francis of Assisi piled upon him with scarce more than a responsive groan. Chastening he needs: he will not sustain overmuch chastisement. Yet we retain much of the red-tape asceticism which pertained to those robuster days. Our monastic rules were designed for another age.

Ascetic
red-tape.

They have been mitigated, in some of the severer Orders, to meet modern exigencies: but no mitigation can effectually alter their unsuitability to this modern Britain. They are not only obsolete: the whole incidence of them was devised for a sunny clime, a clime of olives, wine, and macaroni. Fasts fall plump and frequent in the winter season, when in the North they mean unmeditated stress upon the young constitution; while the summer, when fast could be borne, goes almost free of fast. So you have Orders where scarce the rosiest novice passes his profession without an impaired, if not a shattered, constitution. Not so much the amount, but the incidence, of austerity needs revision. Not solely in

the kingdoms of this world, but in the kingdom also of God, the administration may become infected by the red-tape microbe.

But this is to invade the domain of monastic asceticism, which is beyond my province. Quite enough is the weltering problem of secular religion. How shall asceticism address itself to this etiolated body of death? For all that I have said regards only the externals of asceticism. Asceticism in its essence is always and inevitably the same. The weak, dastardly, and selfish body of to-day needs an asceticism—never more. The task before religion is to persuade and constrain the body to take up its load. It demands

Health and Holiness

The
body of
life.

great tenderness and great firmness, as with a child. The child is led by love, and swayed by authority. It must feel the love behind the inflexible will ; the will always firm behind the love. And to-day, as never before, one must *love* the body, must be gently patient with it :—

“ Daintied o'er with dear devices,
Which He loveth, for He grew.”

The whole scheme of history displays the body as “ Creation’s and Creator’s crowning good.” The aim of all sanctity is the redemption of the body. The consummation of celestial felicity is reunion with the body. All is for the body ; and holiness, asceticism itself, rest (next to love of God) on love of the body.

As love, in modern Christianity, is increasingly come to be substituted for the motive-power of fear; may it not be that love of the body should increasingly replace hatred of the body as the motive even of asceticism? We need (as it were) to show a dismayed and trembling body, shrinking from the enormity of the world, that all, even rigour and suppression, is done in care for it. The incumbency of daily duty, the constant frets of the world and social intercourse, the intermittent friction of that ruined health which is to most of us the legacy from our hard-living ancestors, the steady mortification of our constitutional sloths and vanities; may not these things make in themselves a handsome asceticism,

Health and Holiness

The day's burden.

less heroic, but not less effectual than the showy austerities of our fore-fathers? A wise director, indeed, said, "No." Such external and unsought mortifications came to be borne as an habitual matter—grudged but accepted, like the gout or some pretty persistent ailment. The observation may be shrewdly right; but I confess I doubt it. The accumulated burthen of these things seems to me to exact a weary and daily—nay, hourly fresh intention. If, however, voluntary inflictions be necessary to subdue this all-too-subdued body, they should not be far to seek without heroic macerations which very surely our stumbling Brother Ass cannot support.

The co-operation of the body must be enlisted in the struggle against the body. It is the lusts of the healthy body which are formidable; but to war with them the body (paradoxically) must be kept in health; the soldier must be fed, though not pampered. Without health, no energy; without energies, no struggle. Seldom does the *faineant* become the Saint; the vigorous sinner often. *Pecca fortiter* (despite Luther) is no maxim of spirituality; but he that sins strongly has the stuff of sanctity, rather than the languid sinner. The energies need turning Godward; but the energies are most necessary. Prayer is the very sword of the Saints; but prayer grows tarnished save the brain

Health
and
Prayer.

be healthful, nor can the brain be long healthful in an unhealthy body. So you have that sage Archbishop already quoted advising against long morning devotions for weaker vessels: "The brain requires some time after the night's rest, and some food, to regain its normal power," says he. And again: "You are suffering the consequences of the wilfulness as regards health in years long past; these consequences cannot be prevented now. The most you can do, the most you can hope for, is to lessen them as much as possible." Or yet again: "The most you can do is to be patient, to avoid swearing and grumbling, to say some prayers mechanically, or to look at your crucifix." These things are

not said to Saints : but alas ! sanctity has small beginnings ; there are no short cuts, no “Royal roads” (as à-Kempis says) to God. One must start even like these unheroic souls ; and on those most weary small beginnings all the after-issues rest. Not so much to restrain, but to foster the energies of our *dilettanti* and for-weary bodies, and throw them on the ghostly Enemy ; that is the task before us. For that, is this Fabian strategy all which remains to us ?

To foster the energies of the body, yes ; and to foster also the energies of the will : that is the crying need of our uncourageous day. There is no more deadly prevalent heresy than the mechanical theory

The
lynch-pin
of the
faculties.

which says : “ You are what you are, and you cannot be otherwise.” Linked with it is the false and sloven charity which pleads : “ We are all precious scoundrels in some fashion ; so let us love one another ! ” The fraternity of criminals, the brotherly love of convicts. That only can come out of a man which was in a man ; but the excessive can be pruned, the latent be educed ; and this is the function of the will. The will is the lynch-pin of the faculties. Nor, more than the others, is it a stationary power, as modern materialism assumes it to be. The weak will can be strengthened, the strong will made stronger. The will grows by its own exercise, as the thews and sinews grow : *vires acquirit eundo* : it

increases like a snowball, by its own motion. I believe that the weakest man has will enough for his appointed exigencies, if he but develope it as he would develope a feeble body. To that special end, moreover, are addressed the sacramental means of the Church. But it is also terribly true that the will, like the bodily thews, can be atrophied by indolent disuse; and at the present time numbers of men and women are suffering from just this malady. "I cannot," waits upon, "I tried not." The active and stimulative, not the merely surgical asceticism, which should strike at this central evil of modernity, is indeed a thing to seek. Demanding so much sparing, so much spurring; so much gentleness, so

The im-
mutable
mutable.

much unswervingness ; never so much to be considered, and never exacting more anxious consideration ; this poor fool of a present body is indeed a hard matter for the spiritual physician to handle, yet not beyond his power. The Church is ever changing to front a changing world ; *et plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose.* She brings forth out of her treasures new things and old—even as does that world to which she ministers, which moves in circles, though in widening circles. She is so divinely adjusted to it, that nothing can it truly need but she shall automatically respond : the mere craving of the world's infant lips suffices to draw from her maternal and ever-yielded bosom, the milk.

So she is now proving, with that insensible gradualness in change, as of Nature's self, which is her secret. When very persecution has recognised the profound change in men, and vindictiveness foregoes the infliction of tortures which justice once held paternal amenities of correction, it would be strange if so tender a mother as the Church had maintained the rigidities of a discipline evolved for a race at once ruder and harder than ourselves. The continual commutations of fasting and other physical penances, in present days, sufficiently attest the contrary. Of that more intimately discriminating relentingness which must rest with the private director, those letters of Archbishop Porter,

The
Church,
the
Heart of
Charity.

more than once quoted, furnish a singularly commendable and sagacious example. The degree to which the current of a life is ruffled by the wind of circumstance, coloured by its own contained infirmities, and affected by the nature of its source, has only in these latter days begun to be realised in all its profound extent. An age which sees the apotheosis of the personal mode in literature, an age in which self-revelations excite not impatience, but a tenacious interest far from wholly ignoble or merely curious, an age which has shifted its preoccupation from the type to the individual, naturally apprehends more subtly these complexities of the individual life. And the result is perhaps —even in that Church always the

very heart, and that priesthood always the very members of charity — a charity one thought nearer to the charity of the Eternal. For it is a charity based on a more sensitive delicacy of justice; and He is archetypal Charity because He is archetypal Justice.

And if the maternal cares of the Church be thus increased by the frailty of the modern body, she is not without maternal recompense. We have thus far regarded that profound change, so widely evident, as though it were an unmixed evil. But in all change, well looked into, the germinal good out-vails the apparent ill. A regard thus onesided misses the most potent ally of the

Nature
the
Ascetic.

Church and ultimate stickler for ascetic religion—Nature. Nature, which some say abhors asceticism, in her larger and subtler processes steadily befriends—nay, enforces it. A favourite employment of men is the venting of these shallow libels on Nature. They have called her foe to chastity — her, who ruthlessly penalises its violation. No less, looking largely back over human history, I discern in her a pertinacious purpose to exalt the spirit by the dematerialisation (if I may use the phrase) of the body. Slow and insensible, that purpose at length bursts into light, so to speak, for our present eyes. For all those signs and symptoms, upon which I have insisted even to weariness—however

ill from the mere material standpoint, what do they mean but the gradual decline of the human animal, the gradually ascending supremacy of the spirit on the stubborn ruins of the bodily fortress; that we have, by an advance evident from its very pain—

“ Moved upward, working out the beast ”?

In one large word (is it over-bold?), Nature is doing for the Church what each individual saint, passionately anticipative, had formerly to do for himself. She is macerating the body.

Look but back on the past. Realise the riotous animality of primitive man. Witness the

"Working out
the
Beast."

amazing progenitive catalogue of Jewish king after Jewish king, the lengthening bede-roll of his wives: then reflect that these men still thirsted, with more than the thirst of a second Charles or a Louis Bien-Aimé, after illicit waters. Or recall, if you will, the two thousand wives of Zinghiz Khan. Remember, from a hundred evidences, that all the passions of these men were on a like turbulent scale; and estimate the distance to the British paterfamilias, a law-abiding creature in every way, who (according to the Shah's epigram) prefers fifty years with one wife to a hundred years with fifty wives. A poor and sordid comparison enough, you may think—he is not an heroic figure, Mr. Smith of

the City—but it measures a distance, the better because no one imputes it to him for a merit; and a distance you have not thought to measure.

There is another measure far nobler, deeper, less obvious. Its two *termini* are Dante and St. Paul. The teaching of St. Paul with regard to marriage represents the eternal mind of Christianity: out of it have unfolded all the lilyed blossom of Christian wedlock and (by consequence) Christian love. Yet the spirit, the tone, of St. Paul concerning marriage (with reverence be it said) in our modern perspective seems but a little way from that of the heathenesse around him. Doubtless there was a world between

From
Paul to
Dante.

them, to the sense of his day; but in the perspective of nineteen hundred years the gulf becomes a crevice. To what silver spirals would climb that spirit which he rooted fast in dogma St. Paul could not foresee; and even yet has it put forth its apex-bud? For the Christian love-poets it was left to incarnate the spirit of waxing Christianity in regard to that love which was the effluence of the Pauline counsels. Thus it is that the passage from the first great Christian teacher to Dante is the passage to "an ampler ether, a diviner air" in the relations of man and woman. And that transition is the measure of a vast insensible spiritualism bathing the very roots of human society.

Along uncounted lines you may follow up, with attentive meditation, this steady working of history towards the higher man, this secret treaty between Nature and her asserted antagonist, asceticism. Constantly obscured, or seemingly contradicted, in historic detail, in particular periods, it becomes arrestingly patent in a large and spatial view. The existing valetudinarianism of our overspent bodies is, I would suggest, a mere stage in the wider beneficent process. But are the iniquitous potencies of the body to be checked by the destruction of all potency?—a question to be asked. It would be a poor world if the ultimate issue were a mere stagnant virtue, in which morality should

Holiness
ener-
gises.

luxuriate like duckweed—a middle-class Eden of the respectabilities; if (after the saying of a departed Bishop) we were to put off the old man merely in order that we might put on the old woman. But against that prospect, against a remedy which might justifiably be accounted worse than the disease, comes in another force—the force of sanctity itself. For *holiness energises*. The commonest of common taunts is that of “idle monks,” “lazy saints,” and the like. But most contrary to that superficial taunt, a holy man was never yet an idle man. The process of sanctity, like the Egyptian embalmers, destroys only to preserve the lustiness of the body, and a saintly could never be an effete world.

Let us, again, look back to the basis of Nature. In our times Science has partially brought into daylight the obscure physiology of the will: we know that the will of one man may heal or quicken the body of another. We call it therapeutic hypnotism; and the long name confers scientific orthodoxy on what was a pestilent heresy. Nor only this: we know, also, the possibility of self-hypnotisation; we know that a man's own will can heal or quicken a man's own self. Are not these the days of Mrs. Eddy and "Christian Science," and many another craziness which is the over-seeding of this truth? Solely as a natural matter, by its profound effect on the personality, by its quickening of the will, sanc-

The
Divine
quicken-
ing.

tity (then) would produce a quickening of the body. But that is only the basis, the physical basis of the process. The body (I might say) is immersed in the soul, as a wick is dipped in oil; and its flame of active energy is increased or diminished by the strength or weakness of the fecundising soul. But this oil, this soul, is enriched a hundredfold by the infusion of the Holy Spirit; the human will is intensified by union with the Divine Will; and for the flame of human love or active energy is substituted the intenser flame of Divine Love or Divine Energy. Rather, it is not a substitution; but the higher is added to the lower, the lesser augmented by and contained within the greater. The

effective energies of the fleshly wick, the body, are correspondingly and immensely augmented. If self-hypnotisation have quickening power, how life-giving must be that force when the human is reinforced by the Divine Will, the human soul gathered into the Soul of all being ! In such fashion is it that sanctity the destroyer becomes sanctity the preserver ; and through the passes of an ascetic death leads even the body, on which its hand has lain so heavy, into a resurrection of power.

This truth is written large over the records of saintliness. The energy of the saints has left everywhere its dents upon the world. When these men, reviled for impot-

Sacred
and
secular
song.

ence, have turned their half-disdainful hand to tasks approved by the multitude, they have borne away the palm from the world in its own prized exercises. Take, if you will, poetry. In the facile forefront of lyric sublimity stand the Hebrew prophets : not only unapproached, but the exemplars to which the greatest endeavour after approach. The highest praise of Milton, Dante, supreme names of Christian secular song, is to have captured spacious echoes of these giants' solitary song. In so far, then, and from one of their aspects, these great poets are derivative ; and could not so have written without their sacred models. Yet the Hebrew prophets wrote without design of adding to the world's poetry, with-

out purpose of poetic fame, intent only on their message (unblessed word, yet “an excellent good word till it was ill-sorted”): they thought only of the kingdom of God, and “all these things were added unto them”! Or consider, in another field of human endeavour, St. Augustine. Throughout his brilliant youth he was simply a rhetorician of his day; a dazzling rhetorician, a noted rhetorician, but he produced nothing of permanence, and might have passed from the ken of posterity as completely as the many noted rhetoricians who were his contemporaries. He rose to literary majesty and an authentic immortality only when he rose to sanctity. Yet those works which still defy time were the by-

Inci-
dental
greatness.

product of an active episcopal life, a life of affairs which would have soaked in the energies of most men. With like incidentalness Francis of Assisi sang his Hymn to the Sun, that other Francis—of Sales—wrote his delightful French prose, John of the Cross poured out those mystical poems which are among the treasurable things of Spanish literature, and unforgotten prose works besides ; all in the leisure hours of lives which had no leisure hours, lives which to most men would have been death.

For holiness not merely energises, not merely quickens ; one might almost say it prolongs life. By its Divine reinforcement of the will and the energies, it wrings from

the body the uttermost drop of service; so that, if it can postpone dissolution, it averts age, it secures vital vigour to the last. It prolongs that life of the faculties, without which age is the foreshadow of the coming eclipse. These men, in whom is the indwelling of the Author of life, scarce know the meaning of decrepitude: they are constantly familiar with the suffering, but not the palsy of mortality. Regard Manning, an unfaltering power, a pauseless energy, till the grave gripped him; yet a “bag of bones.” That phrase, the reproach of emaciation, is the gibe flung at the saints; but these “bags of bones” have a vitality which sleek worldlings might envy. St. Francis of Assisi is a flame of active love

*"We are
always
young."*

to the end, despite his confessed ill-usage of "Brother Ass," despite emaciation, despite ceaseless labour, despite the daily hæmorrhage from his Stigmata. In all these men you witness the same striking spectacle; in all these men, nay, and in all these women. Sex and fragility matter not: these flames burn till the candle is consumed utterly. "We are always young," said the Egyptian priests to the Greek emissaries; and the Saints might repeat the boast, did they not disdain boasting. It was on the instinctive knowledge of this, on the generous confidence they might trust the Creator with his creation, that the Saints based the stern handling of the body which some of them afterwards allowed to have been excessive. For

though the oil can immensely energise and prolong the life of the wick, it is on that corporeal wick, after all, that the flame of active energy depends. The fire is conditioned by the fleshly fuel. No energy can replace the substance of energy; and while some impoverishment is a necessity of ascetic preparation, waste is a costly waste. For, even as a beast of burthen, this sore-spent body is a Golden Ass.

But with all tender and wise allowance (and in these pages I have not been slack of allowance), it remains as it was said: “He that loseth his life for Me shall find it.” The remedy for modern lassitude of body, for modern weakness of

Holiness,
the
talisman.

will, is Holiness. There alone is the energising principle from which the modern world persists in divorcing itself. If “this body of death” be, in ways of hitherto undreamed subtlety, a clog upon the spirit, it is no less true that the spirit can lift up the body. In the knowledge of the body’s endless interplay with the spirit, of the subtle inter-relations between this father and daughter, this husband and wife, this pair whose bond is at once filial and marital, we have grown paralysingly learned in late days. But our knowledge is paralysing because it is one-sided. Of the body’s reactions and command upon the spirit we know far indeed from all, yet fearfully much. Of the potency, magisterial, benevo-

lent, even tyrannous, which goes forth from the spirit upon the body we have but young knowledge. Nevertheless it is in rapid act of blossoming. Hypnotism, faith-healing, radium—all these, of such seeming multiple divergence, are really concentrating their rays upon a common centre. When that centre is at length divined, we shall have scientific witness, demonstrated certification, to the commerce between body and spirit, the regality of will over matter. To the blind tyranny of flesh upon spirit will then visibly be opposed the serene and sapient awe of spirit upon flesh. Then will lie open the truth which now we can merely point to by plausibilities and fortify by instance: that Sanctity is medicinal, Holiness

Is
Holiness
Health?

a healer, from Virtue goes out virtue, in the love of God is more than solely ethical sanity. For the feebleness of a world seeking some maternal hand to which it may cling a wise asceticism is remedial.

Health, I have well-nigh said, is Holiness. What if Holiness be Health? Two sides of one truth. In their co-ordination and embrace resides the rounded answer. It is that embrace of body and spirit, Seen and Unseen, to which mortality, sagging but pertinacious, unalterably tends.

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